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THE UNGUARDED HOUR




SOMETIMES IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEPARATE FACT FROM LEGEND. EVEN AFTER THE LAPSE OF A FEW YEARS, IMAGINATION BEGINS TO PLAY A PART IN THE RELATING OF EVENTS. HERE ARE TWO STORIES: ONE CARVED IN COLD STONE BY AN ANCIENT CIVILISATION, THE OTHER CONTAINED IN THE PRECISE OFFICIAL ARCHIVES OF THE WAR OFFICE. CAN THEY BE DISMISSED AS FLIGHTS OF FANCY?

I AM PROFESSOR KORNGOLD
I HAD NOT SEEN THE WAR OFFICE
RECORDS WHEN THE SKAGGER
RUNESTONE PHOTOGRAPHS WERE
SENT TO ME FOR TRANSLATION.

Chapter 1. A Goward's Dream

ARCHAEOLOGISTS AND HISTORIANS KNEW PROFESSOR KORNGOLD AS THE OUTSTANDING AUTHORITY ON RUNIC WRITING, THAT IS, THE WRITINGS OR CARVINGS IN THE ANCIENT CHARACTERS OF NORTHERN EUROPE.



IT IS ONLY BY CHANCE THAT THE WAR OFFICE RECORDS CAME INTO MY HANDS AFTER— AND MARK ME WELL— AFTER I HAD WRITTEN OUT THE STORY OF THE RUNESTONE FOUND ON THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER.

THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER! REMOTE, MISTY ISLE OF THE NORTH— CALLED BY SOME THE ISLAND OF DISHONOURABLE DEATH.

IN THE CAMP OF SVEN THE VIKING, ON THE NIGHT BEFORE BATTLE WITH RIVAL TRIBES, TWO TIRED SENTRIES WERE SUDDENLY BROUGHT TO INSTANT ALERTNESS BY A HIGH-PITCHED, FRIGHTENED VOICE. THEY RAN TO THE PLACE FROM WHENCE IT CAME...



KEEP AWAY— DON'T COME NEAR ME! HELP— THE MONSTER, IT'S... AAAGH!

IT IS THE VOICE OF THE CHIEF'S SON! HASTEN— WE MUST HELP HIM!

THE MOONLIGHT GLINTED ON NAKED STEEL AS THE SENTRY PLUNGED INTO THE TENT OF SVENSON. THEY STARED ABOUT THEM IN SURPRISE...



I MUST GET AWAY—
THE MONSTER. HELP
ME — HELP!

THERE IS NO-ONE
HERE. SVENSON
DREAMS AN EVIL
DREAM!

WAKE HIM UP!
THAT IS ALL THE
HELP WE CAN
GIVE HIM.



ROUGH HANDS SHOOK THE CHIEF'S SON INTO WAKEFULNESS. STILL GRIPPED IN THE TERROR OF HIS EVIL NIGHTMARE, HE STARED IN DRUGGED HORROR.

WAKE UP,
LAD! YOU WERE
DREAMING!

WITH THE DAWN THE VIKINGS GIRDED THEMSELVES FOR BATTLE. THE CHIEF'S SON APPEARED WITH HAGGARD FACE...

HO, LAD / WHAT AILS THEE ON THIS DAY OF BATTLE?

IT IS NAUGHT, MY FATHER. I SLEPT ILL, BUT I JOY IN THE COMING FRAY.

BUT THE YOUNG MAN AVOIDED THE KEEN SCRUTINY OF HIS FATHER'S EYES. ANOTHER MAN WAS STANDING CLOSE BY AND HIS COMPELLING GLANCE MADE SVENSON TURN AND LOOK UP...

GOODBYE!

STEP ASIDE WITH ME FOR A MOMENT, MY SON...

GUDVIED THE WARLOCK POSSESSED STRANGE POWERS OVER MEN'S MINDS - AND, SO THE VIKINGS BELIEVED - OVER THE VERY FORCES OF NATURE HERSELF...



THE BATTLE WILL BE A TEST OF YOUR NEW MANHOOD, SVENSON. BUT SOMETHING TROUBLES YOU...

IT IS MY DREAMS, GUDVIED. I DREAM OF STRANGE BATTLES AND WEIRD MONSTERS. I CANNOT UNDERSTAND THEIR MEANING AND I SHALL HAVE NO REST UNTIL I DO...

THE WARHORNS OF THE VIKINGS WERE SOUNDING THEIR ROUSING CHALLENGE AS SVEN LED HIS WARRIORS TO MEET THEIR ENEMIES. GUDVIED CALLED AFTER THE SON OF THE CHIEF...



FORGET YOUR DREAMS, SVENSON, UNTIL AFTER THE BATTLE. I WILL SPEAK WITH YOU AGAIN LATER...

I CANNOT FORGET THE DREAMS - BUT I WILL FIGHT!

SOON, THE TWO SIDES WERE LOCKED IN MORTAL COMBAT. THE GREAT BATTLE AXES CLANGED ON SHIELDS, FIERCE INARTICULATE SHOUTS ROSE ABOVE THE CLASH OF STEEL. BUT EVEN IN THE CLAMOUR AND CONFUSION THE SON OF SVEN THE CHIEF COULD SEE AND HEAR ONLY THE DREAD PHANTOMS OF HIS DREAMS.



AND THERE, IN THE MIDST OF BATTLE, THE SON OF A VIKING CHIEF THREW DOWN HIS ARMS AND FLED! FOR A MOMENT, SVEN THE MIGHTY WAS UNGUARDED - AND AN ENEMY SPEAR PLUNGED HOME.



DESPITE THE LOSS OF THEIR LEADER, THE TRIBE OF SVEN THE VIKING BESTED THE FOE IN A BITTER CONFLICT. THEN THEY CAME FOR THE CHIEF'S SON...

YOU PROVED A COWARD IN BATTLE, SVENSON, AND OUR CHIEF, YOUR FATHER, DIED BECAUSE OF IT. NOTHING CAN ATONE FOR THAT.

SEIZE THE COWARDLY DOG! HE SHALL DIE AS ALL COWARDS DIE - ON THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER!

SO IT WAS THAT GUDVIED THE SORCERER TOOK THE SON OF SVEN TO THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER ABOARD A LEAN DRAGON SHIP. THE NUMBNESS OF DESPAIR HAD PARALYSED THE YOUNG MAN...

EVEN I DO NOT UNDERSTAND. YOU WERE ALWAYS THE BRAVEST OF THE YOUNG MEN.

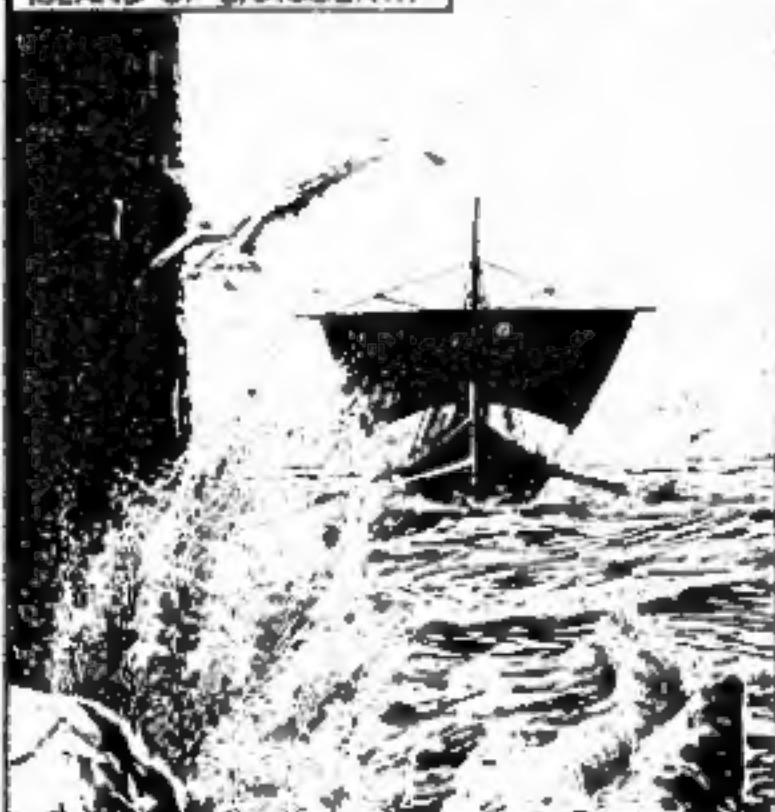
IT WAS MY DREAMS! THEY DRAINED THE LIFE AND COURAGE FROM ME. CAN YOU EXPLAIN THEM, GUDVIED?

AS THE LONGSHIP CROSSED THE MISTY NORTHERN SEA, GUDVIED LISTENED. BUT ALL HIS WARLOCK'S WISDOM COULD NOT UNRAVEL THE MEANING OF THE DREAMS.

I DREAMED OF STRANGE BATTLES—AND OF MONSTERS! WEIRD BEINGS WITH A SINGLE GREAT HORN, THAT STALKED ME WITHOUT LEGS AND BREATHED A FIERY BREATH!



AT LAST THE DRAGON SHIP NEARED THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER...



WHERE WILD WOLVES ROAMED—WHERE ANY MAN LEFT ALONE WOULD DIE A TERRIBLE DEATH.

THEY PUT THE COWARD ASHORE ON THE ISLAND OF DISHONOURABLE DEATH, KNOWING THAT, WEAPONLESS, HE WOULD SOON FALL VICTIM TO THE RAVENOUS WOLVES.



LATER WE SHALL RETURN WITH YOUR STORY CARVED ON A RUNESTONE, SVENSON...

I MUST KNOW, GUDVIED. MY LIFE AND HONOUR HAS BEEN LOST THROUGH A DREAM. WHAT WAS THE BATTLE? WHAT WERE THOSE MONSTERS? YOU ARE A MIGHTY SORCERER... GIVE ME AN ANSWER!

STILL THE YOUNG MAN'S CRIES FOLLOWED GUDVIED AS HE BOARDED THE LONGSHIP.

YOU MUST TELL ME, GUDVIED! AM I TO DIE WITHOUT KNOWING WHY? REVEAL TO ME THE MEANING OF MY DREAMS! I MUST FIND THAT WEIRD BATTLE!



THE WARLOCK SMILED SADLY



SEEK THE BATTLES YOU DREAMED OF — SON OF SVEN — AND MAY ODIN BE WITH YOU IN YOUR QUEST

THUS ENDED THE HISTORY INSCRIBED ON THE RUNESTONE OF SKAGGER.



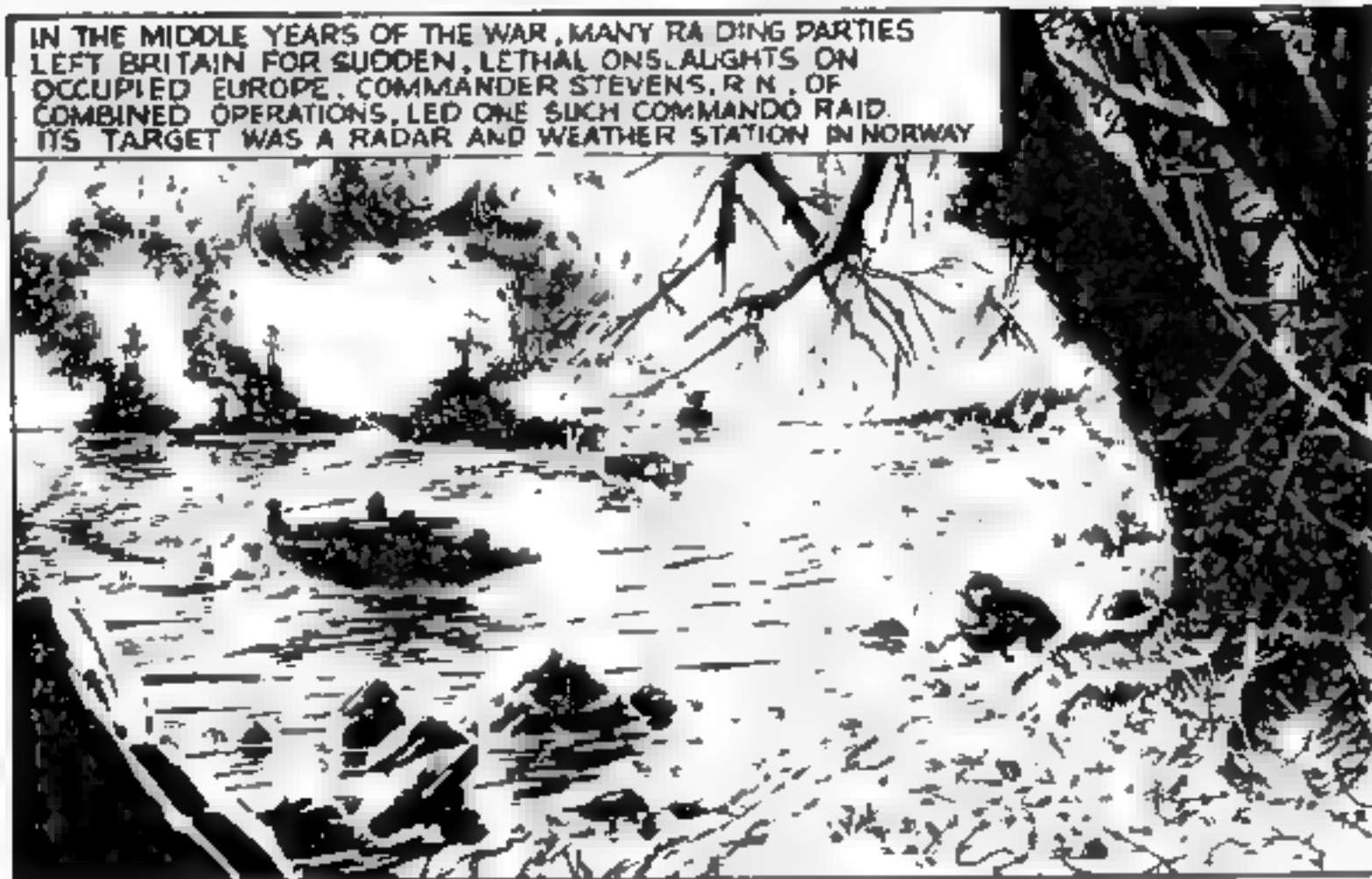
Chapter 2. *Strange Commando*



A THOUSAND YEARS SEPARATE THE TALE OF THE VIKING WHOSE DREAMS SENT HIM TO A HIDEOUS DEATH AND THE SECRET RECORD OF A SECOND WORLD WAR COMMANDO RAID, SEPARATE—OR DID THOSE THOUSAND YEARS BRIDGE THE GULF OF TIME?

THERE MAY BE NO CONNECTION AT ALL. I HAVE PRESENTED THE RECORD FROM THE PAST THE MODERN STORY IS EVERY BIT AS STRANGE

IN THE MIDDLE YEARS OF THE WAR, MANY RAIDING PARTIES LEFT BRITAIN FOR SUDDEN, LETHAL ONSLAUGHTS ON OCCUPIED EUROPE. COMMANDER STEVENS, R.N., OF COMBINED OPERATIONS, LED ONE SUCH COMMANDO RAID. ITS TARGET WAS A RADAR AND WEATHER STATION IN NORWAY



THE COMMANDOS SWARMED ASHORE AND THERE WAS NO HINT OF OPPOSITION, FOR THE LANDING-PLACE HAD BEEN SELECTED WITH CARE.

IF THE REST OF THE OPERATION GOES AS WELL AS THE LANDING, WE SHOULD BE WELL CLEAR BEFORE THE NAZIS GET ORGANISED

I JUST HOPE WE MAKE IT BEFORE THOSE PANZERS WE HEARD ABOUT MOVE IN

THE COMMANDER NODDED CRISPPLY. HE HAD NO WISH FOR HIS FORCE TO TANGLE WITH NAZI ARMOUR

THE RADAR STATION FIRST, THEN THE WEATHER POST WE *MUST* BLOW THEM AND BE CLEAR IN TIME



The Unguarded Hour

LEADING THE FIRST ELEMENTS TOWARDS THE RADAR SITE, CAPTAIN LLOYD FELT THE EXCITEMENT OF IMMINENT ACTION BUBBLING THROUGH HIM

"WARE MINES! WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO BREAK THROUGH ABOUT A HUNDRED YARDS ON, SERGEANT-MAJOR STEEL."

RIGHT, SIR! KEEP QUIET, BACK THERE!



PRIVATE GINGER MARTIN, ONE OF THE BREN GUNNERS BRINGING UP THE REAR OF THE GROUP, GRIMACED AT HIS NUMBER TWO

COR! TO HEAR OLD STEEL, ANYONE'D THINK WE WERE ON PARADE

PUT A SOCK IN IT, GINGER!



THEY SKIRTED THE LAST OF THE BARBED WIRE AND THE MINEFIELD - AND THEN STRUCK INLAND

EVERYTHING SEEMS QUIET, STEEL THE JERES JUST DON'T EXPECT THE WAR TO REACH THEM UP HERE

I'M NOT SO SURE, S R. THEY'VE BROUGHT PANZERS HERE, SO THE BRIEFING SAID THEY COULD MEAN REAL TROUBLE



THE ADVANCE PARTY BREASTED THE PINE-CLAD RIDGE CAUTIOUSLY

THERE IT IS -
THE RADAR
STATION!

JUST
LIKE THE
MODELS

LET'S GET
THE PERISHING
THING BLOWN UP
AND SCARPER!

IN THE NARROW VALLEY, A THIN
STREAM WOUND WHITELY
BENEATH THE MOON
CROWNING THE DISTANT CREST
WERE THE MASTS AND BUILDINGS
OF THE RADAR STATION



CAPTAIN LLOYD LED HIS MEN DOWN
TOWARDS THE STREAM.

EXTRA CARE FROM HERE
ON, SERGEANT-MAJOR
WE'VE GOT TO GET AS
FAR UP THAT SLOPE AS
POSSIBLE BEFORE
THEY SPOT US.



THEY WADED ACROSS THE ICY STREAM
AND BEGAN THE SLOG UP THE NEXT
SLOPE. EVERY STEP NOW WAS FRAUGHT
WITH DANGER...



HALFWAY UP THE HILLSIDE THE SILENCE
WAS SHATTERED BY THE CRACK AND
WHINE OF BULLETS - NAZI BULLETS

TAKE COVER -
SPREAD OUT -
MARTIN, TAKE YOUR
BREN TO THE LEFT,
MOVE!

YESSIR!



FLAT ON THEIR STOMACHS, GINGER MARTIN AND BILL ROGERS INCHED THEIR WAY OVER ROCKS AND THROUGH THE SPARSE VEGETATION

HEY, BILL, THESE JERRIES MEAN BUSINESS!

KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN, GINGER—OR YOU'LL HAVE A HOLE IN IT!

THE OUTFLANKING MOVEMENT WAS TAKING TOO MUCH TIME AND CAPTAIN LLOYD TOOK AN ANXIOUS GLANCE AT HIS WATCH

HANG IT! THE MAIN PARTY WILL BE UP SOON AND WE HAVEN'T DONE OUR JOB

THEY'LL HEAR THE SHOOTING, S R—SO THEY'LL HAVE SOME WARNING

THE BREN CREW WERE IN POSITION AT LAST AND AS SOON AS GINGER MARTIN OPENED UP, THE OTHER BREN JOINED IN.



SERGEANT DODDS HAD BEEN DETAILED WITH HIS SECTION TO MOVE OUT TO THE RIGHT AND TO CO ORDINATE HIS ATTACK WITH THE BREN FIRE.

READY, LADS —
A STRAIGHT RUSH
IN WHERE THEY'RE
NOT EXPECTING
US!



THE COMMANDOS BURST
FROM COVER, FIRING HARD.

COME ON!
INTO 'EM!

ACHTUNG!
KOMMANDO!



BUT THEIR HEADLONG CHARGE WAS SUDDENLY
HAMMERED TO A HALT AS ENEMY FIRE
THRASHED INTO THEM FROM RIGHT, LEFT
AND CENTRE

WE'VE
GOT THEM!
KILL THEM
ALL!

A TRAP!
FALL BACK
AND GROUP
AROUND
ME!



AUTOMATIC WEAPONS STAMMERED VICIOUSLY
AS THE FEW SURVIVING COMMANDOS
GROUPED AROUND SERGEANT DODDS



PULL BACK—
CAREFULLY NOW.
NO RUNNING—WE'LL
DO THIS LIKE THE
DRILL BOOK SAYS!

THE FIERCE UPSURGE OF FIRING ON HIS
RIGHT FLANK TOLD CAPTAIN LLOYD ALL
WAS NOT WELL.

DODDS HAS RUN INTO
TROUBLE, SERGEANT-
MAJOR. THERE MUST
BE MORE JERRIES
THAN WE BARGAINED
FOR.



I'LL TAKE
A LOOK,
SIR!

IF ANYTHING, THE RATE OF FIRE HAD
INCREASED AS THE GERMANS STROVE TO
WIPE OUT THE RETREATING COMMANDOS.

THE SAR'NT'S
BOUGHT IT! KEEP
MOVING, LADS!



THEN, AS THE R.S.M. CAME IN SIGHT OF THE ACTION, MORTARS BEGAN TO SAVAGE THEM. HE STARED IN DISMAY AT THE POORLY FEW KHAKI-CLAD FIGURES.

THEY'RE PULLING OUT -
WHAT'S LEFT OF 'EM!
WE'VE FAILED TO BREAK
THROUGH TO THE
STATION!

CAPTAIN LLOYD GRIMACED AT THE NEWS
AND TURNED TO ONE OF HIS JUNIOR OFFICERS

THE FLANK ATTACK
GOT NOWHERE, TIM. BUT
WE *MUST* BREAK THROUGH -
THE COMMANDER WILL BE UP WITH
THE MAIN PARTY AT ANY MINUTE
GIVE US SMOKE FROM YOUR
MORTARS - WE'RE GOING IN WITH
THE BAYONET!

APTA IN SHORTER MEN BEGAN TO ADD THEIR DATA TO THE COMPOUND OF BATTLE AND WHEN THE CRUCIAL LINE WAS REACHED THE SAME THING THEY WOULD...



APTA IN TWO WAS ABOUT TO BE THE FIRST TO MOVE WHEN, OUT OF THE THICKENING SMOKE, AHEAD OF A... PART ENGINE...



FINGERS INSTINCTIVELY TIGHTENED ON TRIGGERS AS THE COMMANDOS STARED IN STARTLED SURPRISE AT THE NEWCOMER

COR!
WHERE DID
HE COME
FROM?

HE'S NOT
GERMAN - HE'S
IN BRITISH
BATTLEDRESS

GRAB HIM
QUICK BEFORE
HE GETS HIMSELF
KILLED!

IT WAS PRIVATE BILL ROGERS
WHO DASHED OUT INTO THE BULLET
LASHED SMOKE TO DRAG
THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER
INTO THE PRECARIOUS
SAFETY OF THE TREES

COME ON,
MATE, LOOK
LIVELY!

WHAT -
WHERE AM I?
THAT NOISE -
IT'S TERRIBLE!

IT WAS NO MOMENT FOR POLITENESS, BILL ALMOST FLUNG THE MAN INTO COVER AND DROPPED FLAT HIMSELF

LUMME! YOU
MUST BE BONKERS
STANDING AROUND
IN THIS!

GOOD WORK,
ROGERS. KEEP AN
EYE ON HIM, WILL
YOU - UNTIL WE'RE
SURE HE'S NOT
A JERRY!

CAPTAIN LLOYD NERVED HIMSELF
ONCE AGAIN TO GIVE THE ORDER
TO ADVANCE BUT ANOTHER
INTERRUPTION CHOKED IT IN
HIS THROAT

MESSAGE FOR
CAPTAIN LLOYD FROM
THE COMMANDER—
URGENT!

A
MESSAGE—
NOW!

AS THE RUNNER PANTED OUT THE MESSAGE
LLOYD FROWNED ANGRILY

THE COMPANY IS TO
PULL BACK, SIR WE'RE
GOING TO HIT THE WEATHER
STATION FIRST AS WE
CAN'T GET THROUGH
HERE!

PULL BACK?
BUT THIS WAS MY
JOB IF I WITHDRAW
NOW I'LL ADMIT
FAILURE!

THE VETERAN SERGEANT MAJOR
SHRUGGED WHEN HE WAS TOLD

THERE WERE JUST TOO
MANY OF 'EM, SIR WE'D
HAVE HAD A LOT OF
CASUALTIES IT'S NO
DEFEAT TO PULL
BACK AND HIT 'EM
SOMEWHERE ELSE!

YES,
SERGEANT-
MAJOR, YOU'RE
RIGHT, OF COURSE
VERY WELL,
TELL THE
MEN

RELUCTANTLY, BITTERLY,
THE COMMANDOS FELL
BACK UNDER COVER
OF THEIR OWN SMOKE.

CAPTAIN LLOYD'S COMPANY SOON REJOINED THE MAIN PARTY UNDER COMMANDER STEVENS.

DON'T FRET OVER IT, HUGH. BUT WE *MUST* HIT THAT RADAR SITE BEFORE WE LEAVE!

I'M SORRY, SIR. I WAS JUST ABOUT TO LEAD A BAYONET CHARGE WHEN THE RUNNER REACHED US!

A BAYONET CHARGE! LUCKY FOR YOU YOU DIDN'T GO IN

YES, SIR BUT WE WOULD HAVE DONE IF A MAN HADN'T POPPED OUT OF THE SMOKE FROM NOWHERE AND DELAYED US.

CAPTAIN LLOYD REMEMBERED THAT DARK AND MYSTERIOUS FIGURE LOOMING FROM THE SMOKE

THAT FELLOW WHO POPPED OUT OF THE SMOKE, SERGEANT-MAJOR HAVE YOU STILL GOT HIM?

YES, SIR. D'YOU WANT TO TALK TO HIM?

HE MIGHT BE USEFUL. I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU, HUGH, THAT THIS BUSINESS ISN'T GOING AS PLANNED BUT WE MUST DO WHAT WE CAME FOR, AND A LOCAL GUIDE MIGHT TURN THE ODDS.

THE STRANGER WAS BROUGHT BEFORE COMMANDER STEVENS. BEDRAGGLED AND BEWILDERED, THE MAN LOOKED AROUND HIM UNEASILY.

HERE HE IS, S.R. CLAIMS HE'S A NORWEGIAN.

WHO ARE YOU? WHAT'S YOUR NAME?



I AM A FREE NORWEGIAN SOLDIER BUT I DO NOT KNOW HOW I CAME HERE - I CANNOT REMEMBER MY NAME I KNOW - IT IS SVENSON!

SOMETHING ABOUT THE NORWEGIAN SOLDIER TOUCHED COMMANDER STEVENS STRANGELY - ALMOST AS IF HE HAD SEEN THE MAN BEFORE

LET ME SEE YOUR PAYBOOK, SVENSON.

HERE IT IS, SIR BUT IT SEEMS INCOMPLETE...



STEVENS STUDIED THE PAYBOOK. THE STRANGER HAD TOLD THE TRUTH, THE PAYBOOK WAS ALMOST BLANK...

INCOMPLETE IS RIGHT! YOUR NAME, SVENSON - AND YOUR STATION - THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER. H'MM. NEVER HEARD OF IT! YOU MIGHT BE SVENSON, AND AGAIN YOU MIGHT NOT. SAR'MAJOR, KEEP AN EYE ON THIS MAN, WILL YOU?

YES, S.R.

AS IF WE HAVEN'T ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT WITHOUT A PHONEY NORWEGIAN!

THE COMMANDOS RAPID CHANGE OF DIRECTION HAD THROWN THE NAZIS' DEFENCE OFF BALANCE AND STEVENS WAS ABLE TO BRING HIS MEN TO THE R JUMP OFF POINTS UNMOLESTED

THERE IT IS, LADS. FORWARD WE GO - AND MAKE AS LITTLE NOISE AS POSSIBLE



THE COMMANDOS MOVED STEALTHILY TOWARDS THE WEATHER STATION - DARTING FROM COVER TO COVER BUT ALWAYS GETTING CLOSER. STILL NO SHOTS CAME TO CHALLENGE THEIR ADVANCE.



BUT THE ENEMY HAD BEEN ALERTED - AND WAITED ONLY FOR THE CRUCIAL MOMENT TO STRIKE.

THEY'LL HAVE TO GET UP EARLIER THAN THIS IN THE MORNING IF THEY HOPE TO SURPRISE US. DON'T FIRE UNTIL I GIVE THE ORDER!

WATCHING THAT SILENT ADVANCE, CAPTAIN LLOYD BECAME AWARE THAT SVENSON, THE FREE NORWEGIAN SOLDIER, WAS STARING WITH PUZZLED EYES TOWARDS THE GERMAN POSITIONS.

ALL MY WILD WELSH ANCESTRY TELLS ME THERE IS SOMETHING STRANGE ABOUT THIS MAN — YET I CAN'T BELIEVE HE IS A GERMAN SPY

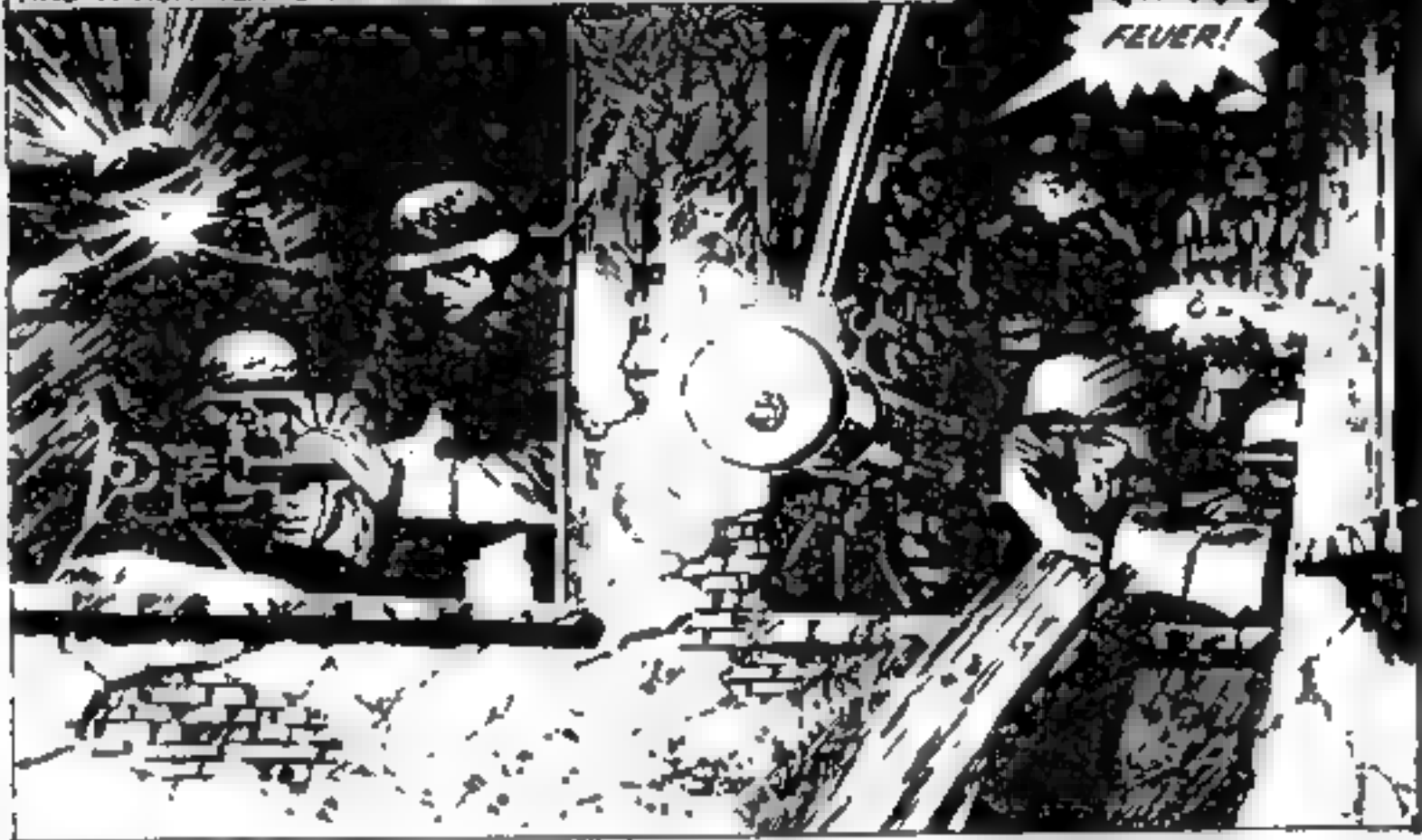
I WISH I COULD REMEMBER MY NAME, SVENSON — THE ISLE OF SKAGGER BUT WHAT ELSE —
WHAT ELSE?

SEEKING, PERHAPS, TO TEST THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER, CAPTAIN LLOYD TRIED TO GOAD HIM INTO ACTION AGAINST THE GERMANS

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN THERE'S A WAR ON? YOU ARE A FREE NORWEGIAN — AND OVER THERE ARE YOUR ENEMIES, THE INVADERS OF YOUR COUNTRY

YES! THAT I REMEMBER!
I CAME HERE TO FIGHT.
AND FIGHT I WILL!

AT THAT VERY MOMENT, THE NAZI GUNS FLAMED INTO LIFE AND A HURRICANE OF LEAD SWIFT THE COMMANDO LINE



BUT ONLY A FEW OF THE COMMANDOS WERE CUT DOWN BY THAT SHOCK BURST OF FIRE FOR SUPERB TRAINING AND CHAIN-LIGHTNING REFLEXES HURLED THEM TO THE GROUND

GET THE MORTARS IN ACTION / AS SOON AS THE BOMBS GO IN - WE ATTACK!



AS THE MORTARS COUGHED AND THE TWO-INCH BOMBS SAILED OVER TO CRASH IN DEADLY EXPLOSIONS ON THE ENEMY DEFENCES, SVENSON STARTED UP IN HORROR...

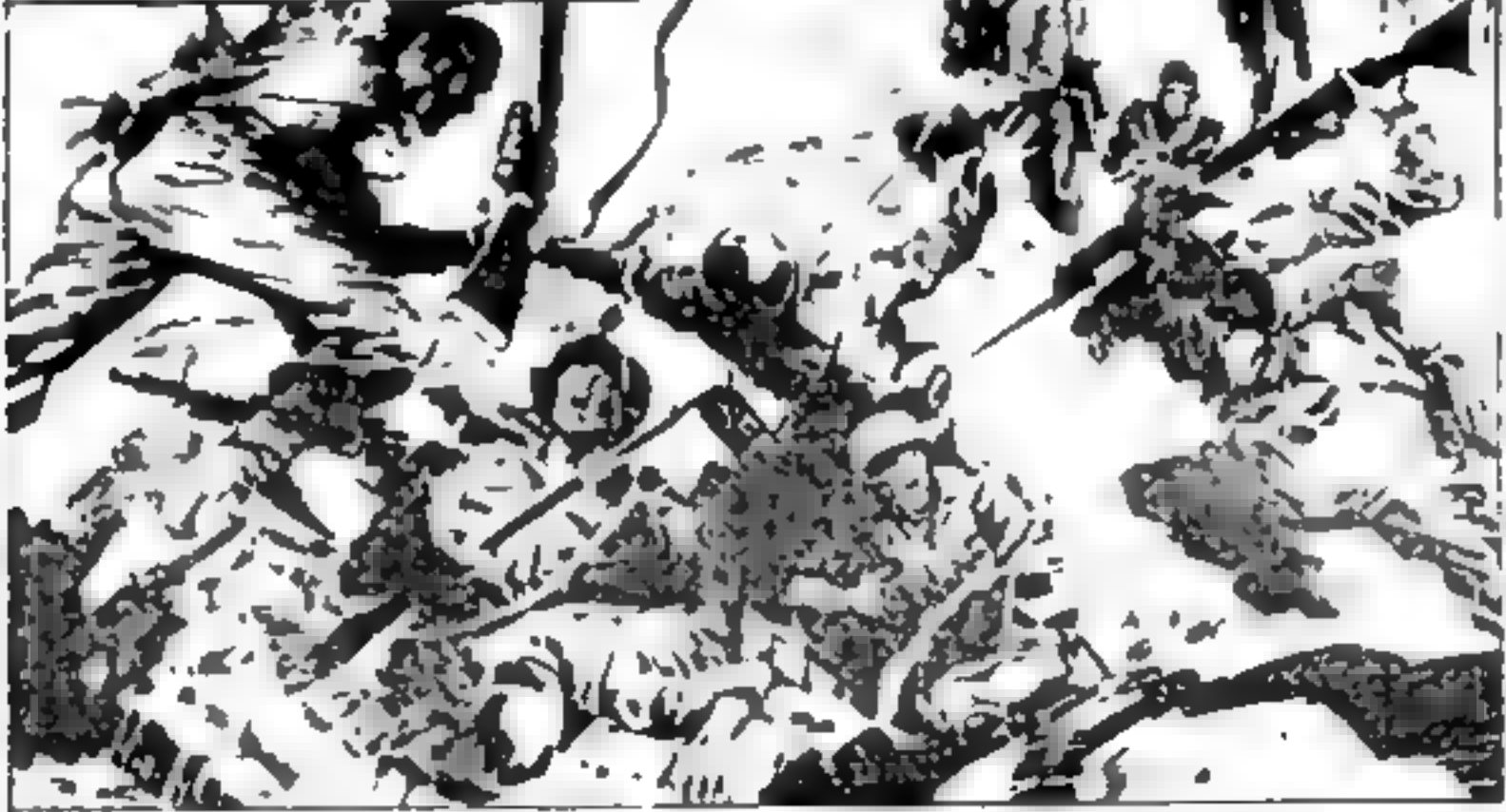
WHAT'S UP, SVENSON?
SURELY YOU'VE SEEN
MORTARS IN ACTION
BEFORE?

MORTARS —
OF COURSE / IT'S
JUST THAT — THEY
SHOOK ME, JOLTED
MY MEMORY

UNDER COVER OF THAT BATTERING BOMBARDMENT AND THE HARSH CLAMOUR OF BREN AND TOMMY GUNS, THE COMMANDOS WENT IN

CHARGE!

A WILD AND FURIOUS MELEE
DEVELOPED ACROSS THE TRENCHES
AS COMMANDOS AND GERMANS
FOUGHT IT OUT HAND TO HAND



SUDDENLY SVENSON
LET OUT A BLOOD-
CURDLING YELL AND
FLUNG HIMSELF
TOWARDS THE SCENE
OF CONFLICT

AIEEE!
TO ARMS!
TO ARMS!



PAUSING ONLY TO SNATCH UP A FALLEN COMMANDO'S RIFLE AND BAYONET, HE
PLUNGED INTO THE THICK OF THE FRAY



THE COMMANDOS RALLIED TO THAT DEMONIAK FIGURE OF FIGHTING FURY AND
THE ENEMY BROKE

NOW'S OUR CHANCE!
ATTACK! SVENSON'S
BROKEN THEM UP FOR
US!



AFTER THAT IT WAS A MERE QUESTION OF MOPPING UP THE SURVIVORS OF THE NAZI INFANTRY AND SETTING THE FUSES OF THE EXPLOSIVE CHARGES.

THAT WENT OFF
VERY NICELY, GENTLEMEN—
THANKS TO OUR FRIEND
SVENSON. NOW WE WILL
TACKLE THE RADAR
STATION

LET'S HOPE
OUR ATTACK HERE
DRAWS OFF SOME
OF THE MEN FROM
THE RADAR
SITE

SVENSON - MY THANKS
FOR YOUR EFFORT - YOU
SAVED MANY OF MY MEN'S
LIVES.

IT'S NOTHING
TO SLAY AN ENEMY

THEN, WITH A SHATTERING DETONATION,
THE WEATHER STATION BLEW UP. PHASE
ONE OF THE COMMANDO MISSION WAS
COMPLETED.



BUT PHASE TWO,
THE DEMOLITION
OF THE RADAR SITE,
WAS TO BE AN EVEN
MORE DESPERATE
VENTURE.



Chapter 3. *The Monsters*

AS SVENSON JOINED WITH THE COMMANDOS IN THEIR FORCED MARCH ON THE RADAR SITE, GINGER MARTIN AND BILL ROGERS FELL INTO STEP WITH HIM

YOU SPEAK GOOD ENGLISH, SVENSON. YOU BEEN TO ENGLAND?

ENGLAND? I - I DON'T REMEMBER!

YOU DON'T SEEM TO REMEMBER MUCH AT ALL, DO YOU, MATE?

THE TRAIL LED ACROSS BOULDER STREWN SLOPES, THROUGH SHADOWY PINE FORESTS

I REMEMBER NOTHING - EXCEPT THAT COMMANDER STEVENS SEEMS FAMILIAR TO ME AS THOUGH I HAD KNOWN HIM A LONG TIME AGO

WELL, HE'S THE BEST CO ANY UNIT CAN HAVE - EVEN THOUGH HE'S A MATE, LOT!

COMMANDER STEVENS HALTED ON THE NEXT
RISE, CAUTIOUSLY STUDYING THE WAY
AHEAD WITH HIS GLASSES



MM! THEY'RE
LYING ACROSS OUR
PATH, BUT WE'LL BEAT
'EM YET GET THAT
NORWEGIAN FELLOW
UP HERE, JENKINS

SVENSON CAME FORWARD EAGERLY...



SVENSON - DO YOU KNOW
THIS COUNTRY AT ALL? IS
THERE ANY OTHER ROUTE
WE CAN TAKE?

YES, COMMANDER
THERE IS A WAY
AROUND - BUT IT IS
VERY DANGEROUS!

THE COMMANDOS WERE NOT MEN
TO BAULK AT DIFFICULTIES WHEN
THE SUCCESS OF THEIR MISSION
HUNG IN THE BALANCE

PASS THE WORD TO
TAKE IT CAREFULLY.
I WANT LIVE COMMANDOS,
NOT DEAD HEROES.



VERY GOOD,
SIR - BUT THAT
SVENSON IS
SETTING A
CRACKING
PACE

FOLLOWING ALONG THAT CRAZY TRACK, GINGER MARTIN'S FOOT SLIPPED, AND HE BEGAN TO SLIDE

HELP!
I'M
FALLING!

HOLD ON,
GINGER—AND
KEEP QUIET,
FOR PETE'S
SAKE!

IT WAS BILL ROGERS WHO FLUNG HIMSELF FORWARD TO GRAB HIS FRIEND'S HAND JUST IN TIME

COME
UP!

THANKS, BILL,
COR I THOUGHT
I'D BOUGHT
IT THEN!

SOON THEY WERE ON A NARROW LEDGE DIRECTLY BENEATH THE NAZI POSITIONS AND SVENSON LED THE WAY WITH EXTREME CAUTION.



SHIELDED FROM DIRECT OBSERVATION BY THE CLIFF OVERHANG, THE COMMANDOS INCHED PAST THE GERMAN POSITIONS BUT IT WAS DEADLY DANGEROUS WORK.



AT LAST THAT SILENT ORDEAL WAS OVER AND THEY CAME OUT ON TO COUNTRY THAT PROVIDED GOOD COVER ALL THE WAY TO THE OBJECTIVE

HE'S A QUEER COVE, THAT NORWEGIAN, BUT WE WOULDN'T HAVE GOT THIS FAR WITHOUT HIM!

AND THAT'S A FACT!


CAPTAIN LLOYD WAS DETAILED TO TAKE AN ADVANCE PARTY FORWARD TO SCOUT THE APPROACHES TO THE RADAR SITE UNDETECTED THEY CREEPT WITHIN SIGHT OF THE TARGET

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF IT, SAR'MAJOR? SEE ANY SIGN OF JERRIES?

NOT ONE, SIR THEY MUST ALL BE GUARDING THE SADDLE APPROACH

SVENSON HAD EDGED FORWARD BESIDE THE COMMANDO OFFICER AND HE SUDDENLY PUT OUT A RESTRAINING HAND.


WAIT, CAPTAIN
ALL IS NOT WHAT
IT SEEMS



THROUGH NARROWED, PALE BLUE EYES, SVENSON SURVEYED THE STRETCH OF OPEN COUNTRY

AM, THERE -
IN A HOLE IN THE
GROUND SIX OF
OUR ENEMIES!

YOU'RE RIGHT,
BY HEAVENS! A
SPANDAU TEAM -
SITTING SNUG
WAITING FOR US
TO WALK ON TO
THEM!



A MORE SEARCHING SCRUTINY OF THE AREA WITH THE GLASSES DID NOT REVEAL ANY OTHER ENEMY POSITIONS AND LLOYD GAVE A HISS OF SATISFACTION.

YES, ONLY
HALF A DOZEN
OF THE DEVILS!
SAR MAJOR, WE
CAN TAKE
THEM!

LEAVING SVENSON AND GINGER MARTIN BEHIND WITH THE BREN GUN, CAPTAIN LLOYD LED THE OTHERS FORWARD IN A SILENT STALK OF THE UNSUSPECTING ENEMY

YOU MAY
HAVE A DODGY
MEMORY, SVENSON,
OLD MATE - BUT THERE'S
NOT MUCH WRONG
WITH YOUR
EYESIGHT!

THE GERMANS DID NOT EVEN SENSE THE PERIL CREEPING REMORSELESSLY UP ON THEM. THEN...

QUICK
AND QUIET!
NO FIRING!



IT WAS ALL OVER IN A FEW FEVERISH SECONDS.

WILSON - TELL THE
COMMANDER WHAT'S
HAPPENED. SAY THE
REST OF THE WAY
LOOKS CLEAR.

RIGHT,
SIR!



CAPTAIN LLOYD TURNED TO THE NORWEGIAN, HIS DOUBTS OF THE STRANGER FOREVER BANISHED

THANKS AGAIN,
SVENSON YOU'RE
THE RIGHT SORT OF
SOLDIER TO HAVE
IN A BATTLE

BATTLES -
I REMEMBER -
NO! IT ELUDES
ME



COMMANDER STEVENS LED HIS MEN THROUGH THE POSITION CAPTURED BY CAPTAIN LLOYD

GOOD WORK, HUGH, AND SVENSON, TOO. AS YOU'VE TAKEN THIS POSITION YOU CAN HOLD IT WHILE WE DISPOSE OF THE RADAR TARGET

RIGHT, SIR—
WE'LL HOLD THEM
OFF YOU'LL SAY
IF THEY COME
THIS WAY!

CAPTAIN LLOYD'S COMPANY SELECTED THE REDEFENSIVE POSITION AND DUG IN

THIS IS THE PART
THAT GETS ME—THE WAITING!
HOW LONG ARE THOSE
DEMOLITION BOYS GOING
TO TAKE TO BLOW THAT
DUMP SKY HIGH?

YOU WORRY
TOO MUCH, GINGER.
THE JAPS DON'T
EVEN KNOW WE'RE
HERE YET!

OVERCOMING SLIGHT OPPOSITION AT THE TARGET, THE COMMANDOS SET ABOUT THE DEMOLITION, BUT COMMANDER STEVENS WAS EDGY.

EVERYTHING'S GOING SMARTLY, SIR. GIVE THE LADS ANOTHER HALF HOUR.

I'M GOING TO CAPTAIN LLOYD'S POSITION, SERGEANT-MAJOR - IF JERRY'S COMING, HE'LL COME THAT WAY!

VERY GOOD, SIR BUT WE'LL BE ALL RIGHT.

STILL NOTHING HAD STIRRED ACROSS THE FLAT AREA FRONTING LLOYD'S POST ON HIS MEN WAITED, WATCHFUL, FINGERS ON TRIGGERS.


ALL
QUET,
HUGH?

NOTHING
MOVING?
MAYBE THEY WON'T
TURN UP UNTIL
AFTER THE BIG
BANG


The Unguarded Hour

THEN, ABTAINLY, STRIDENTLY, THE WAITING TENSION BROKE. OUT FROM THE TREES BURST A HORDE OF GREY UNIFORMS, RACING HEADLONG TOWARDS THE THIN LINE OF COMMANDOS.

CHARGE!
FOR THE
FUEHRER!



THAT FEET'S SODDEN RUSH CARRIED THE NAZI ONSLAUGHT CLEAR UP TO THE BRITISH POSITIONS. BUT IT WAS MET WITH COOL ACCURATE FIRE FROM MEN WHO WOULD NOT BE PANICKED.



IN THE CLAMOUR AND CONFUSION OF THE STRUGGLE SVENSON FOUGHT LIKE A MAN POSSESSED. BUT HE FAILED TO NOTICE A GERMAN ABOUT TO ATTACK HIM FROM THE REAR - UNTIL COMMANDER STEVENS SHOUTED



THE COMMANDER'S SNAPPED SHOT MISSED AND THEN HIS REVOLVER CLICKED EMPTY. THE BIG NAZI LUNGED AT HIM AND SVENSON MOVED LIKE LIGHTNING



The Unguarded Hour

THE NAZI ATTACK WAS HURLED BACK, BROKEN — AND THE COMMANDOS TOOK UP THEIR DEFENSIVE POSITIONS AGAIN

SVENSON SAVED MY LIFE THERE WITHOUT A DOUBT A STRANGE CHAP

FOR A MOMENT ALMOST REMEMBERED — IT WAS AS IF IT HAD HAPPENED BEFORE BUT NOT IN QUITE THE SAME WAY!

A RUNNER RAVED UP TO THE CO

THERE'S BEEN A HITCH, SR THE MAJOR SAYS CAN YOU HOLD ON FOR ANOTHER FIFTEEN MINUTES?

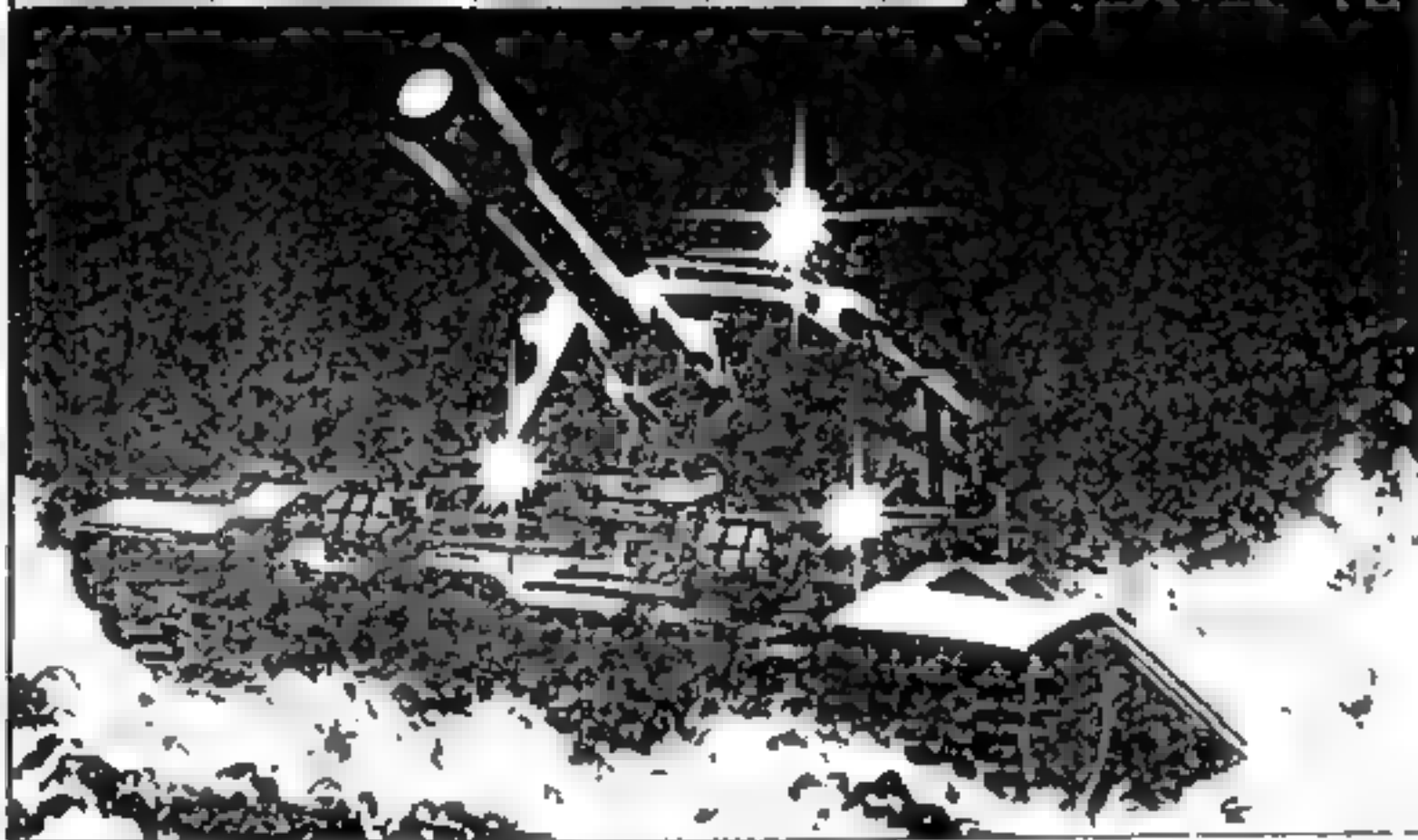
IF WE HAVE TO WE WILL

THEN, WITH BLOOD-CHILLING FINALITY, CAME AN OMINOUS CLANKING AND A RUMBLE OF POWERFUL ENGINES

DO YOU HEAR THAT?

PANZERS!


THE GREAT STEEL JUGGERNAUTS THUNDERED INTO VIEW, SPANDAU MACHINE GUNS
FLICKERING WICKEDLY IN THEIR SINISTER BLACK HULLS



SHELLING BEHIND THEM WERE THE GERMAN INFANTRY - SECURE FROM THE
SEARCHING FIRE OF THE COMMANDO BREN GUNS



SVENSON GASPED IN HORROR AT THOSE ADVANCING TANKS, THE LONG GUN MUZZLES CUTTING BEFORE THEM LIKE GREAT HORNS, BELCHING VIVID TONGUES OF FLAME AS THE GUNS SPOKE



NO! NO!
THE MONSTERS!
THE MONSTERS
OF MY DREAMS!

HIS NERVE COMPLETELY BROKEN, SVENSON LEAPED TO HIS FEET AND BEGAN TO RUN



HEY, WHAT'S UP
WITH SVENSON?

HE'LL GET
HIMSELF KILLED!
GRAB HIM,
GINGER!

BILL ROGERS LEAPT OUT OF COVER AND SWEEP SVENSON OFF HIS FEET IN A HEADLONG TACKLE.

GET DOWN,
YOU NITWIT!

THE
MONSTERS!

OVER TO THE LEFT, ONE COMMANDO HAD USED A GRENADE TO GOOD PURPOSE AND A PANZER HAD GROUND TO A HALT WITH A SMASHED TRACK

THAT SOLDIER!
HE STOPPED THE
MONSTER!

KNOCK IT OFF,
SVENSON / IT'S BAD
ENOUGH AS IT IS WITH-
OUT CALLING THOSE
TANKS MONSTERS!

YOU'VE SEEN
A PANZER BEFORE,
SURELY, SVENSON?
THE NAZIS USE
'EM ENOUGH

SLOWLY A LIGHT OF UNDERSTANDING BROKE ACROSS SVENSON'S TORTURED FEATURES. HE REACHED OUT, TOOK GRENADES FROM MARTIN AND STARTED TO CRAWL FORWARD...

QUICK, GIVE HIM COVER, GINGER - THE CRAZY COOT'S GOING TO TACKLE THOSE JERRIES ON HIS OWN!

A METAL MONSTER - WITH THE ENEMY INSIDE! NOW I SEE!

SVENSON'S FIRST GRENADE SENT A TRACK SPINNING FROM A PANZER - THE SECOND BLASTED A DRIVING WHEEL OUT OF TRUE. HE REACHED FOR THE THIRD.



THE NORWEGIAN SWEEP AWAY ALL HIS HARROWING DOUBTS AND FEARS IN THAT BRIEF, SAVAGE BURST OF ACTION HE KNOCKED OUT THREE TANKS SINGLEHANDED THEN THE BATTLEFIELD QUAKED TO THE THUNDEROUS ROAR OF A GIANT EXPLOSION AS THE RADAR SITE WAS DESTROYED



THE COMRADES HAD SNATCHED SUCCESS FROM THE BRINK OF DEFEAT BUT IN THAT MOMENT OF VICTORY, THE STRANGE WARRIOR IN THEIR MIDST STAGGERED AND FELL



EVENSON'S
DOWN!

HE'S A GONNER,
THEN! IF THE SHRAPNEL
DIDN'T KILL HIM, THE BLAST
WOULD HAVE - HE WAS
THAT NEAR TO THE
BURST!

A QUICK EXAMINATION OF SVENSON'S BODY CONFIRMED THE VETERAN R.S.M.'S GUESS. SVENSON WAS DEAD ALTHOUGH THERE WAS NOT A WOUND ON HIM. REGRETFULLY THE COMMANDOS LEFT HIM WHERE HE LAY AND BEGAN TO PULL BACK.



LOOKS LIKE WE'VE SHAKEN THEM OFF, SIR. WE OUGHT TO MAKE IT TO THE BEACH SAFELY NOW.

YES, HUGH - AND MAINLY DUE TO THAT MAN, SVENSON. IF HE HADN'T KNOCKED OUT THOSE THREE TANKS, WE'D HAVE BEEN IN REAL TROUBLE.

A STRANGE LOOK OF REGRET, OF HAUNTING SORROW, SHOWED IN COMMANDER STEVEN'S EYES.

I STILL CAN'T SHAKE OFF THE FEELING I'VE SEEN SVENSON BEFORE. HE WAS A BRAVE MAN INDEED.



THERE MUST HAVE BEEN SOMETHING OF THE VIKING IN HIM, SIR - THEY WERE GREAT FIGHTERS. I BELIEVE.

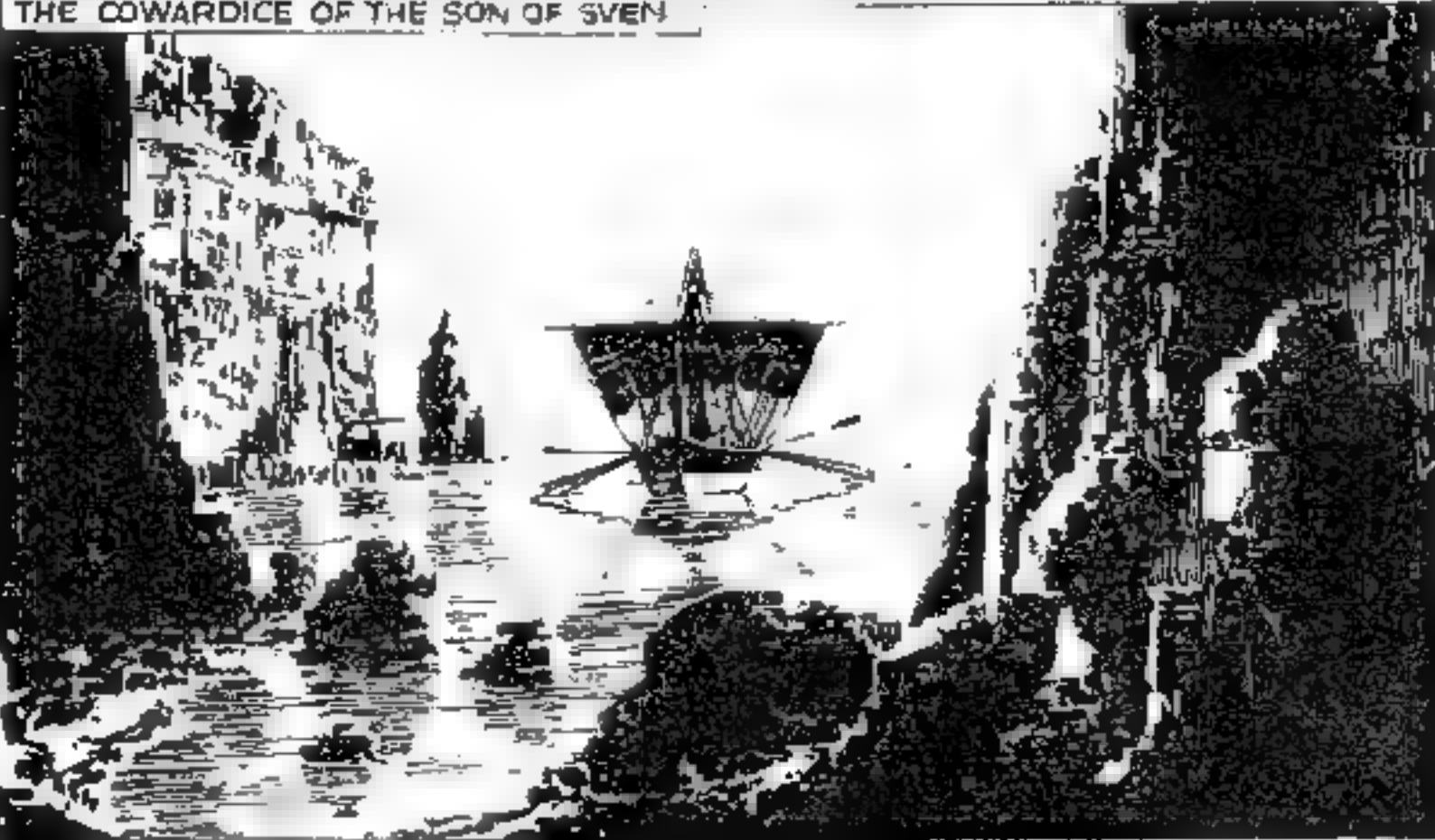
Chapter 4. *The Runestone Mystery*

THUS ENDED THE SECRET WAR OFFICE RECORD OF A COMMANDO RAID. NO-ONE EVER FOUND OUT WHO SVENSON WAS. BUT THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER, NOW— THAT IS DIFFERENT



IN THE RUNESTONE OF SKAGGER HAD BEEN JARVED A KIND OF POSTSCRIPT— AS THOUGH IT HAD BEEN ADDED AFTER THE MAIN STORY HAD BEEN TOLD

IT SEEMED THAT GUDVIED THE SORCERER RETURNED TO SKAGGER AS HE HAD PROMISED, BEARING WITH HIM THE GREAT RUNESTONE TELLING THE STORY OF THE COWARDICE OF THE SON OF SVEN



THE VIKINGS CAREFULLY CARRIED THE STONE ASHORE WHICH WAS TO COMMEMORATE THAT ACT OF SHAME



WE SHALL NOT FIND HIS BODY AND FOR THAT I AM GLAD. THE WOLVES DO NOT FEED DELICATELY HERE ON THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER...

THEY LABOURED UP THE BEACH WITH THE STONE. THEN A VIKING CRIED OUT, HIS VOICE HIGH-PITCHED WITH SHOCK:

LOOK! THE CHIEF'S SON! SEE, HE LIES THERE ASLEEP!

ASLEEP... NO, HE IS DEAD...



THE VIKINGS CROWDED ROUND THE BODY OF THE SON OF SVEN AND THEIR TONES WERE HUSHED WITH AWE...

HE IS DEAD. BUT THE WOLVES HAVE NOT TOUCHED HIM!

THERE IS NOT A MARK ON HIS BODY!



GUDVIED THE WARLOCK STOOPED OVER THE BODY, A SADNESS AND WONDER IN HIS EYES.

AND DID YOU
FIND YOUR MONSTERS,
SVENSON? DID YOU FIND
THOSE BATTLES YOU SOUGHT?
PERHAPS YOU DID - FOR
THE SPIRITS TELL ME YOU
ACQUITTED YOURSELF
LIKE A TRUE VIKING!

THUS ENDS THE STORY ON THE RUNESTONE FROM THE ISLAND OF SKAGGER. IS THERE SOME STRANGE CONNECTION BETWEEN THESE TWO STORIES - ONE FROM A BYGONE ERA AND THE OTHER FROM A PRECISE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF MODERN DAY...

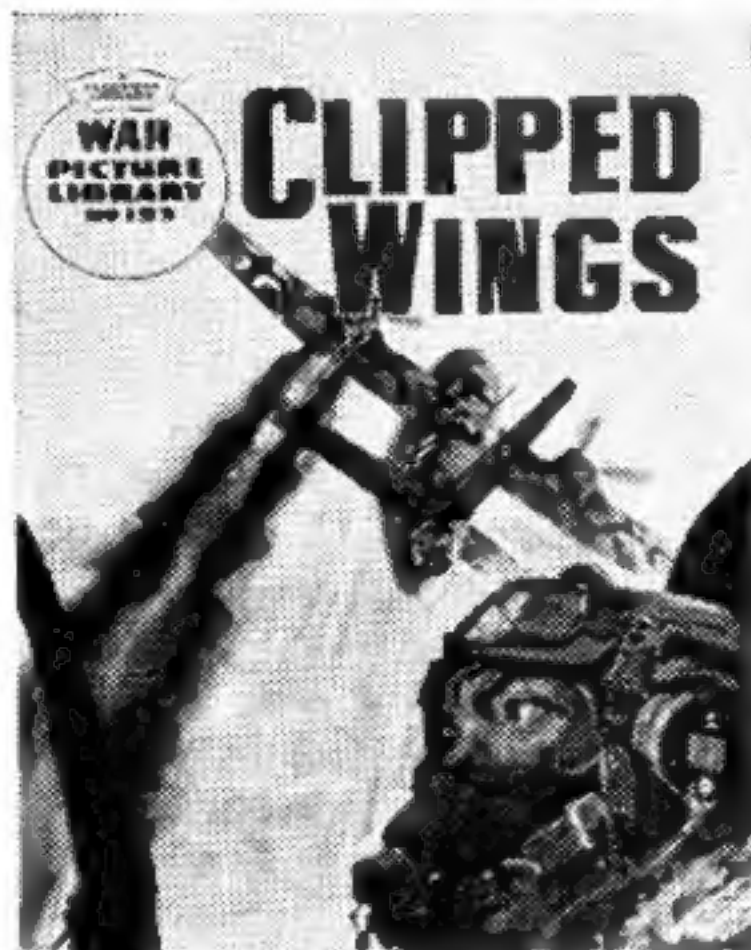
SVENSON WAS
PROBABLY A FREE
NORWEGIAN SOLDIER
WHO HAD LOST HIS
MEMORY. BUT WHO KNOWS
WHAT POWER THE
ANCIENT SORCERERS
WIELED? YOU MUST
MAKE UP YOUR OWN
MIND...

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FOR WAR THRILLS . . . ACTION . . . DRAMA . . .

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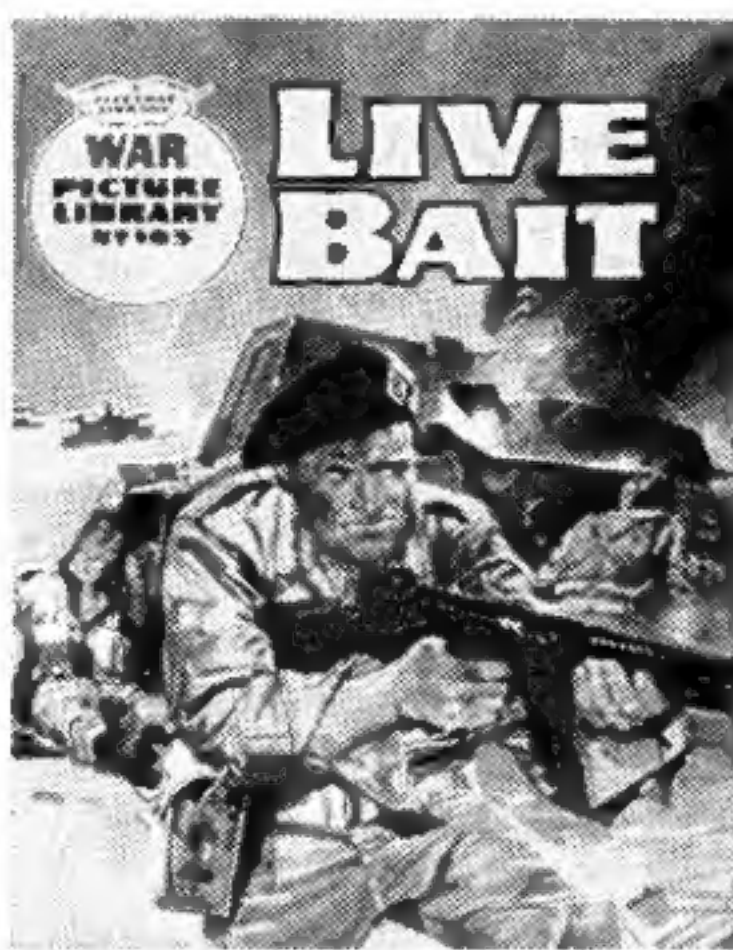
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Show them you can become a husky he-man

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CAN BE PROUD
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